

Overreaching Educational Themes and Concerns in Urban Slums

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Abstract: The children residing in slums lack adequate access to quality education and usually they fail to take advantage of several programmes launched by the government. Consequently, the drop-out rate is quite high among the slum children, which invariably makes them unsuitable for several jobs and they tend to remain unemployed. As a result, a large proportion of these children drift towards delinquency. In the last few decades after the considerable research and experimentation in the context of education of these socially deprived children, it has been realised by the educators that major changes are needed to be incorporated in the educational policies and programming in order to provide better quality schooling to these slum children. This paper is purely based on the secondary sources in which various governmental reports and several other institutional reports as well as journal, articles, books and other web sources have been consulted. This paper is mainly focusing on the various issues and challenges which are being faced by children living in slums and several suggestions have been made in this paper in order to address the challenges of slum dwellers, particularly in context of education.

Keywords: Education, slum children, policies and programmes and schools.

Introduction

One of the most essential tools for solving the number of social problems associated with the urban poverty is educating the socio-economically and culturally deprived children of urban slums. In India, slowly and gradually the educators have realised the fact that children living in slums enter schools with several handicaps from which otherwise the children belonging to the middle class do not suffer. The children residing in slums lack adequate access to quality education and usually they fail to take advantage of several programmes launched by the government. Consequently, the drop-out rate is quite high among the slum children, which invariably makes them unsuitable for several jobs and they tend to remain unemployed. As a result, a large proportion of these children drift towards delinquency.

The early efforts to improve the learning capacity of these less fortunate children ends them into remedial classes, which invariably shifts these under-privileged children from academics to shop or some other manual training work. However, generally it has been realised that the maladjustment of slum children towards schooling is often more complex which seems to be remain unaffected by routine palliatives. In the

last few decades after the considerable research and experimentation in the context of education of these socially deprived children, it has been realised by the educators that major changes are needed to be incorporated in the educational policies and programming in order to provide better quality schooling to these slum children (National Institute of Urban Affairs, 2016).

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a. Financial Investment: For improvement in the educational quality and status of the urban neighbourhood private investment is an important tool. It is usually visible that public investments tend to prioritize the under-developed rural or remote areas whereas the poor urban populations are over-looked. There is an urgent need to look into this matter in order to improve the educational quality in the poor urban areas. Focusing this priority is a matter of serious concern and the private investments along with public investments in the socially and economically backward urban areas will provide an incentive towards this higher rate of rural-to-urban migration.

b. Potential or Capacity Barriers: In most of the developing countries across the world including India the adequate framing, planning, intervention, implementation and monitoring of various policies and programmes at the central as well as the state level constitute the weakest part. In context to the slums, especially those slums that are newly emerged, they represent the highly disorganised and weakest lobby sections. They are the blurry analogue to both the public as well as the private infrastructural investments.

c. Sustainability: Various educational programmes and projects are being runned by some NGOs' for the upliftment of children living in poor urban areas or slums. Some of these projects have proved to be highly successful. However, the approach required for the mainstreaming of such NGOs' still continues to remain unaffordable to the governments having low revenue. This acts as a barrier in the mainstreaming of such NGOs' which could a play crucial role in programmes for accelerated education. These NGOs' can be quite beneficial in increasing the effective enrollment, transition rate, reduction in drop-out and retention of highly vulnerable and marginalised slum children in schools.

d. Input and Cost Effectiveness: Providing quality education as well as cost-effective education to the vulnerable urban slum children is the highly underrated issue. The cost-benefit ratio associated with the investment in the education of slum dwellers is generally considered to be the critical issue. It is highly misunderstood phenomenon. The relatively high input cost of education for urban slum children is not

adequately understood in reference to the proportionally high benefit ratio obtained by incorporating these slum children into the schools providing quality education and keeping them away from the other destructive activities or alternatives. Education plays the most crucial role in the slums. It helps in the reduction of crime, substance abuse, child abuse, gambling, early pregnancies and transmission or spread of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD). It also has therapeutic function for the traumatized slum children as well as it plays a significant role in improving the public health. Obtaining a proper estimate of the cost–benefit rate involved in the education of slum children could help in legitimizing the educational investments in slums.

e. Judicial and Constitutional Problems: Most of the newly developed slums are constructed without any tenure. This means that the slum dwellers are living on the occupied land that does not have any legitimacy. They are usually living under constant threat of demolition of their houses or eviction. The slum dwellers as well as NGOs tend to lower their incentive of investment in these slums due to higher rate of mobility and a constant fear of eviction. From legal point of view these untenured and new squatter settlements usually do not constitute the official area of the city. As a result these slums are not considered and remain uncovered from various basic services such as adequate water supply, electricity, sewerage, garbage disposal, education, health facilities, etc. This implies that soon after the establishment of any new slum it becomes essential to begin the process required for obtaining the tenure. Since a large proportion of slum dwellers are unaware about the process of acquiring legal tenure of the land, here comes the role of political leaders and policy makers because it requires immense political will and adequate expert assistance. Therefore, it is required that some authoritative bodies should be established in order to actively assist this poorly built urban settlements. In a report by UN-Habitat (2007) it has been revealed that are a good proportion of urban households that lacks tenure. In developing countries like India between 30 and 50 percent of the urban residents lacks this security of tenure (Juneja, 2000).

f. Security: The issue of security is closely associated with the tenure. Usually these untenured slum areas are often outside the jurisdiction of law and order. Even in the slums that are tenured, there are other problems that have a negative impact on their life such as poverty, crime, child abuse and substance abuse, etc. In this scenario of violence and insecurity, the importance of schooling increases, but these areas usually lack access to quality education schools. Due to the fear of loss NGOs tend to invest less in slums; usually teachers do not want to work schools situated in slums. Moreover, these teachers, and NGOs are under constant threat of blackmailing by local criminals. Under this type of environment the public bodies are also exposed to more or less similar challenges, however these bodies are sometimes themselves corrupt. This environment of insecurity and violence tend to deter both NGOs as well as the private investors because they are answerable to their donors also.

g. Implementation and Monitoring: The availability of data on education in slums is severely lacking, in fact there are serious limitations. In India slums are usually most poorly surveyed areas. In most of the surveys, they are usually outside the formally accepted and defined urban settlements and therefore, they are outside the sampling frames. Sample listing of these households in slums is the difficult task due to the high rate of mobility and unconventional household structure.

2. Direct Input Costs: The matter of school fees is one of the issues of concern for the slum dwellers, as they have to tackle other expenses under their small earnings. The cost of schooling is seen as a bigger problem by the slum dwellers because they have to deal with the higher prices of daily commodities which put further pressure on their already strained life. Moreover, in rural areas tuition waivers and scholar stipends have been introduced, but the urban poor are severely lagging for these benefits.

3. Costs of Opportunity: Some of the children could not attend schools even when the schools are accessible i.e. within their and affordable because sometimes these children are often involved in child labour, therefore, their time has an alternative use as well as cost.

a. In extremely poor families the parents do not send their children to schools for education because these households in slums might lose their income which they receive from the labour that their children do by involving in various odd jobs and this may prove to be critical for the family (Kingdon, 1998).

b. The cost of opportunity is almost zero in the poor rural areas because of the low requirement of the cash labour. This is due to the limited season of peak agricultural harvesting in the rural areas. Whereas, in the slums scenario is somewhat different and there is constant opportunity for cash labour such as working as street vendor or porter. In the poor households, where the family members are involved in cash labour the income can fluctuate and then it becomes necessary for that household to induce their children in child labour. This strategy works for them in order to meet the acute economic constraints of the market. Consequently, this results in lower enrolment rate, higher irregularity in attendance which affects both the education achievement as well as motivation. When these results are compared with the countryside, the situation is better in rural areas as compared to urban slums.

c. The families in poor urban slums lose household labour as well as income when they send their children to schools. In developing countries like India, the women and children of the poor families try to share the burden by involving themselves in the labour intensive jobs. This means that if the wards are sent to the schools then the women will have to manage all the domestic activities alone. This is perhaps one of the major issues in the urban slums also and it is not restricted to only rural or remote areas. Here, the point that needs to be noted is that majority of the families residing in slums are migrants and the size of the family is usually small slum families. Hence, the families in slums generally lack the flexibility as well as the advantages that are usually available in extended families. As a result this puts an extra pressure on the

family members that are left at home i.e. the children. A very notable example of this is the absence of parents or any guardian for the child care in the households which makes the situation extremely risky environment for the infants or the small children in the family. If the older children in the families are allowed to go to the school then the parents would be left with no option for looking after the younger children. As a result this would be a risk for the young children and further, if the mother stays at home to look after the children then the income of the household would be affected. This shows that in the last the education of the school going children gets severely affected.

4. Issues Related to Access: The children living in slums are left with only two ways in order to have access to the schools i.e. either the schools should be located near the slums or children have to go outside the slums in order to get quality education. However, both the options have their own set of challenges for the slum dwellers:

a. In majority of the slums, especially the old slums there are number of government schools. However, the coverage and the quality of education provided in these schools is not very good. Therefore, the children living in slums depend more on the schools run by the NGOs or in the low-cost private schools. This makes slum dwellers more vulnerable to the NGOs, the donors or any other form of informal nature. But there are several problems associated with these initiatives because sometimes these initiatives are either short-lived or it gets open and close time and again. Availability of adequate infrastructural facilities along with the access to safe drinking water and proper sanitation facilities poses a greater challenge for the slum dwellers, particularly in the new slums. This is one of the important reasons for the higher rate of drop-out among girls. Moreover, the problems which are peculiar to slums such as security issues, violence, crime, public health risks, etc. act as a barrier in attracting well qualified teachers (Aggarwal and Chugh, 2003).

b. There are two main obstacles that the children in slums face in order to gain opportunity and access to schools which are situated outside the slums. The first obstacle is associated with the acceptance. Since most of the families living in slums are generally migrants, therefore they lack the necessary documents such as birth certificate, domicile certificate, which are required during the admission. Due to lack of these documents they could not apply for several scholarships and fee-waiver programmes for which they are eligible and in this way they lose the opportunity for better education.

The second obstacle is associated with the relocation. If we look into the location of slums some of them are adjacent to better-off areas, while others are quite distant from the usual locality. The children of the distant slums have to cover long distances in order to reach the good quality schools. In new emerged or over-crowded slums the facilities of public transportation is usually lagging. The children coming from poor families could not afford to spend money on transportation, which strongly hampers and restrict their movement. Sometimes, the children have to face and deal with extreme situations and the dangers while

reaching to schools or their home. Lack of police security and social security and presence of child abuse and violence make children particularly girls highly vulnerable. Seasonal problems such as severe heat, winter, rain coupled with the environmental dangers in slums further reduces the accessibility of children to schools. On good sun-shining day the roads may be walkable but during rainy season or flooding of sewage the situation worsens for the children while reaching the school. In the case of the slums located in hilly areas, during bad weather the trails or roads can become too dangerous and slippery to walk.

5. Issues Related with the Schools: There are two other problems which the children have to face once they have the access to the schools. They are as follows:

a. Children who go to schools which are situated outside the slums, then these children are usually not welcomed and they have to suffer from the stigma of discrimination. This discrimination could be on many grounds such as it might be related to the children migrating from the rural or remote areas, on ethnic or religion basis, on the basis of lingual diversity or belong to some another social caste. Apart from this, the children coming from slums are generally bullied and targeted because they are marginalised, excluded, vulnerable and poor. The issue of discrimination is not only restricted to the other children of the school. Even sometimes teachers also consider these slum children to be troublesome and often this situation becomes traumatic for the children which might lead to the drop-out of the children.

b. Generally the schools and teachers are not properly equipped to deal with the learning and achievement challenges associated with the children residing in slums. In the teacher training programmes, discussions have been made about the child, but these issues are lagging in reality. In developing countries like India the schools are usually overcrowded and these schools lack severely in terms of infrastructural and other facilities. As a result, the schools have to stretch the existing resources. Children who fail to understand with or cope up the traditional or conservative method of teaching finally end up in being constantly disciplined. Bullying by the other children in the school and consistent scolding and severe criticism from the teachers turns out to be quite demotivating for the children coming from slums and this finally becomes one of the causes for dropouts (Seetharamu, 1983).

6. Causes Responsible for the Learning Challenges among Slum Children

a. Readiness: Mental as well as cognitive will-power and preparedness is required for the process of learning. One of the problems of children coming from the urban slum area is that they live in a constant state of alertness. The cognitive as well as mental development of the slum children has been hampered and severely affected due to their inadequate early childhood care and lack of psycho-social stimulation. In most of the slum households the common features are lack of adequate care, negligence. The households in slums are often run by single parent and for earning their livelihood and feeding their family members this single

parent has to work outside the home. The families in slums are usually migrants and their native place is far away as a result they cannot entrust upon the care of their children to their relatives also.

b. Morbidity: One of the most common features of the slums is high burden of disease particularly among children. The causes for this high rate of prevalence of diseases are unsafe drinking water and inadequate sanitation facilities. As a result slum dwellers suffer from various diseases such as respiratory and parasitic infections as well as gastro-intestinal infections. Slums are at high risk of both vector and water-borne diseases due to open sewerage and lack of sanitation.

c. Malnutrition: In slums the prevalence of malnutrition is usually high and this is expressed in terms of stunting, wasting, underweight and anthropometric failure. A study conducted in few selected slums of India revealed that the rate of anaemia was found to be as high as 90 per cent among adolescent girls, whereas the high incidence rate of Vitamin A deficiency was also the cause of concern.

d. Mental health: The occurrence of social problems in slums such as poverty, social insecurity, violence contribute towards creating the environment of mental trauma and additional psychological stress among slum dwellers. Most of the slums dwellers are migrants, although the cause of their migration may vary. Some have migrated towards cities for better job opportunities, or due to socio-economic problems in the remote or backward areas, while others might have migrated as a result of natural disaster. For this highly vulnerable and socially excluded community the Post-traumatic stress (PTS) and other difficulties are one of the important causes of learning challenges among children. Child abuse, sexual abuse, rape, early pregnancies coupled with relatively low level of public awareness, are responsible for various health problems such as prevalence of HIV- AIDS and several other sexually transmitted diseases.

e. Substance/Drug Abuse: One of the major obstacles in the attainment of education among children living in slums is drug abuse. Consumption of alcohol and intake of other drugs by adults and even by adolescents is one of the constant threats to the young children of school going age. Children who are trapped in substance abuse poses an ultimate challenge to the goal of education for all as their inclusion becomes very difficult.

f. Synergies: In a recent study conducted in slum areas of India it was observed that one out of every four children had disorders related with behaviour or mental health in a slum (Bele et al., 2013). For these disorders not only socio-economic factors are but there are other factors as well such as malnutrition, anthropometric failures, disintegration of family breakdown, becoming mothers at young age, single parenting, lack of discipline, alcoholism or substance abuse, depression, family conflict, etc. All these factors have a significant impact on the achievement level of the children and this result in poor educational performance. These factors put add on stress on the children which hampers their academic growth.

7. Motivation: Majority of the children residing in slums lack motivation for quality education. Sometimes they have this feeling that they can get along well in their life without receiving any formal education. For urban children even for those who are living in slums it is quite common to use mobile phones as well as internet, therefore, it becomes hard for them to adapt to the old method of teaching and outdated curriculum. Apart from this, the availability of job opportunities is quite low especially for these slum children who fail to receive adequate education or any proper training. There are only few individuals such as gang members or drug dealers in these slum communities that appear to be powerful and hence, often such people become role models or youth icons for the slum children.

Conclusion

Collectively, these challenges increase the chances of poor enrolment rate, delayed admission, high rate of drop-out, irregularity in attendance, reduced gender parity among slum children. Effective educational provisions are needed to be formulated and implemented in order to cater the needs of slum dwellers, which are quite different from the other urban population. Establishment of schools near slums, remedial classes for the slum children as well as provision for other programmes in order to accelerate their interest towards the quality education and this would also play a crucial role in their mainstreaming.

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